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“I feel integrated when I help myself”: ESOL Learners’ Views and Experiences of Language Learning and Integration

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This paper describes a small-scale study conducted in England with a group of adult migrant and refugee ESOL learners. The study explores how participants conceptualised integration, and their perceptions of the relationship between learning English and integration. The findings highlight that the extent to which a person feels integrated, for example, by feeling accepted in society and in specific contexts, affects their opportunities for social interaction and improving their English language skills. Recommendations include increasing ESOL funding and provision, and measures to increase learners’ self-confidence by supporting more positive identity positions for migrant and refugee learners of English both inside and outside the classroom.

Keywords: ESOL; integration; identity; second language learning; multilingualism; participatory methods.

Introduction

British political discourse emphasises the need for migrants and refugees to learn English to enable them to integrate (e.g. APPG, 2017; Casey, 2016; Conservatives, 2015; DCLG, 2016). In this discourse, learning and speaking English is portrayed as evidence of a willingness to integrate and embrace British identity and values (Deborah Cameron, 2013; Williamson 2009). However, there are many obstacles to learning English. Government funding in English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) was reduced by approximately 50% between 2008 and 2015 (Martin, 2016; Refugee Action, 2016). ESOL policy varies amongst the countries in Britain; in England these funding cuts together with policy changes since 2006, have resulted in reduced access to classes for many migrants and refugees including those on low incomes, people with childcare responsibilities and many asylum seekers. In addition, political and media depictions of migrants and refugees assigns them negative identity positions, especially

those who are not proficient in English. Occupying deficit identity positions and experiencing inequalities in power can reduce access to the types of social interactions which are conducive to speaking and improving skills in English (Block, 2007; Norton, 2013). There are other barriers to integration besides English language ability, such as discrimination, and lack of access to employment (Bryers, Winstanley & Cooke, 2013; Casey, 2016; Commission on Integration and Cohesion, 2007 Giddley & Jayaweera, 2010). In addition, progress in areas of integration such as improved employment opportunities or access to social relations can facilitate progress in learning English (Charlsey, Bolognani, Spencer, Jayaweera & Ersanilli, 2016; Ros i Sole, 2014).

This article addresses the theme of this special issue by exploring the pain and pressure that migrant and refugee learners of English may experience whilst carving out a life for themselves in England. It describes a small scale qualitative study, the purpose of which was to explore adult ESOL learners' views and experiences of learning English and integration. The study was part of a postgraduate research project and was carried out with a class of ESOL learners at a large adult education college in England. It combined participatory techniques with semi-structured interviews.

The following sections situate the study by examining British political discourse on integration and the English language, and by outlining key research relevant to the language learning and integration experiences of ESOL learners. The research design is discussed including the research context, participants, methods of data collection and analysis. There follows a discussion of the findings, and the article concludes with implications for policy, pedagogy and future research.

Concepts in migration, identity and integration

The concepts and terminology employed to discuss migration, integration and identity are problematic and disputed. This section outlines some of these issues and describes how they are conceptualised for the purposes of this study. The notion of *identity* is complex and contested (Block, 2010) and it is often used interchangeably with *subject position*. Kramsch (2009) defines subject position as

the way in which the subject presents and represents itself discursively, psychologically, socially, and culturally through the use of symbolic systems. It comes from a view of the subject as decentred, historically and socially contingent - a

subject that defines itself and is defined in interaction with other contingent subjects. (Kramsch, 2009, p. 20).

The concepts of *positioning* and *identity negotiation* elucidate how this subject position can be influenced by external factors and has the potential to be contested. The discursive process of subject positioning involves both *interactive positioning* (how individuals are positioned by others) and *reflexive positioning* (how individuals position themselves) (Davies & Harré, 1990). Pavlenko and Blackledge (2004) describe how identities are negotiated through the interplay of interactive positioning and reflexive positioning and between external conditions and individual agency. They emphasise the impact that external individuals and structures have on the negotiation of an individual's subject positioning and identity. An important aspect of how we position ourselves and others is through *identity inscriptions* (Block, 2010) which can include ethnicity, nationality, gender, socio-economic class, occupation, sexuality, religion, age, and immigration status. These identity types may be assigned to, or assumed by individuals or groups, and they may be negotiated or resisted. As a result of negotiation and positioning, identity is a fluid process rather than a fixed entity. A person can hold multiple identities simultaneously which may vary according to context and may be in conflict or be differently salient at different times and circumstances (Block, 2007; Norton, 2013; Rutter, 2013). This paper uses both *identity position* and *subject position* to represent this multiplicity of identity, and to emphasise the role of positioning in individuals' experiences and sense of self; the influence of external individuals and structures; and how this positioning can be resisted and contested as identities are negotiated.

The terms *migrant* and *refugee* are also problematic. In contemporary media and political discourse migrants are often represented as a problem or threat (Blinder & Allen, 2016; Marsh, 2015) whereas in contrast, refugees are often depicted as more deserving of sympathy and resources (Taylor, 2015). Furthermore, factors such as environmental degradation, poverty and global inequalities have brought into question whether it is possible to clearly distinguish between 'voluntary' and 'forced' migrants (Morrice, 2011). However, the UN Refugee Agency maintains that it is important to maintain the distinction between migrants and refugees as conflating the terms can undermine state and public support for refugees (UNHCR, 2015).

Using identity inscriptions such as migrant and refugee can imply homogenous, easily definable groups with fixed identities, and can obscure the multiplicity and fluidity of identity

positions. It must be born in mind that these groups consist of people who have diverse immigration histories including asylum seeker, refugee, family migration and work and economic migration. Their identity positions may be shaped by interaction between, for example, immigration status, nationality, religion, gender, and by how they are positioned by others and how they position themselves. Many may not identify as a migrant or refugee, and describing an individual who has been settled in Britain for some time in these terms clearly has its limitations.

Whilst acknowledging these difficulties, in the paper I use the phrase *migrants and refugees* to describe people who have moved to live in Britain, regardless of motive, whilst emphasising the diverse immigration histories and complex identities of those it refers to. These issues also apply when I refer to migrants and refugees who are learning English as *ESOL learners* or *migrant and refugee language learners*. It must be remembered that the identity inscriptions of migrant or refugee, or of ESOL learner, may have varying salience to each individual, or have no relevance at all to how they position themselves.

Understandings of integration, its desired outcomes and how to achieve these, vary. In addition, use of the term has been critiqued as reinforcing a normative ideal (Spencer & Charlsey, 2016), and recent political discourse displays a move away from multiculturalism towards a more assimilationist idea of integration (Modood, 2013). Here I conceptualise integration as requiring two-way involvement from both migrants and the 'host' institutions and residents (APPG, 2017; Phillimore and Goodson, 2008; Rutter, 2013), and which also consists of dynamic and multidimensional processes which are complex and fluctuating (Bryers et al, 2013; Gidley & Jayaweera, 2010; Spencer & Charlsey, 2016). Integration processes occur in a variety of areas including employment, housing, education, health, social interactions and relationships, cultural knowledge, safety and stability, rights, civic and political participation. Integration also involves fostering a sense of belonging and tackling discrimination and inequality (Ager and Strang 2008, Spencer and Charlsey, 2016). As ESOL classes are viewed by policy makers as a means to facilitate integration for migrants and refugees, (Cooke & Simpson, 2008) the study aimed to explore how ESOL learners themselves define integration, and the role that the acquisition of English plays in integration.

Discourse and policy on identity, language and integration.

English language requirements for settlement in Britain have become increasingly stringent. For example in 2013 an increase in the level of the language requirement was implemented in addition to success in the Life in the United Kingdom (UK) citizenship test (LITUK). This change was accompanied by a government statement that ‘those wishing to become citizens should demonstrate their commitment by learning the English language’ (Harper, 2013). The English language and LITUK testing regimes perpetuate a link between the English language, British identity and values, and integration (Blackledge, 2009; Piller, 2001). In 2011, the then Prime Minister, David Cameron, claimed that multiculturalism had led to a weakening of the collective British identity (David Cameron, 2011). The citizenship and language testing system, and the rhetoric surrounding it firmly implicate migrants and refugees in this “weakening” of national identity. Not only is the English language ‘symbolically linked to national identity’ (Williamson, 2009, p. 2), but those speaking other languages are often represented as a threat to that identity (Deborah Cameron, 2013; Blackledge, 2009; Ros i Sole, 2014). Former UKIP leader, Nigel Farage, claimed that parts of Britain ‘are like a foreign land’ because it is being ‘taken over’ by non-English speaking migrants (Hope, 2014). In 2016 David Cameron reinforced the association between language, multiculturalism and national security when he announced a £20 million fund aimed specifically at teaching ESOL to Muslim women, claiming that not speaking English could make people more susceptible to ‘the extremist message that comes from Daesh’ (BBC News, 2016). This narrative of threat is amplified by discourse that stipulates penalties and coercion for those who do not speak English: for example, by announcing cuts in funding of translation services (May, 2015); promising tougher language requirements for entry and settlement in the UK (Conservatives, 2015); and calling for compulsory enrolment in ESOL classes (APPG, 2017).

Associating British national identity and security with speaking English bolsters a monolingualist ideology which ignores the benefits and realities of multilingualism and devalues other languages and cultures (Simpson, 2012). Rhetoric and policy surrounding issues of immigration, language and British identity positions migrants and refugees negatively, amplifying hostility towards them, especially those who lack English skills. Reports and anecdotal accounts suggest a rise in hate crimes against refugees, migrants, black and minority

ethnic people since the Brexit referendum and the discourse on immigration which surrounded it (Dodd, 2016), including reports of linguistic xenophobia (TLANG, 2016). Rhetoric which focuses on the importance of English deflects attention from the influence of other factors in integration, such as access to employment or discrimination. The success, or otherwise, of migrants to integrate is attributed solely to their willingness to adapt by speaking the language and adopting 'appropriate' cultural identities and habits. In fact, there is little evidence that migrants do not want to learn English; many are unable to access provision and are on waiting lists for ESOL classes (McIntyre, 2017; NATECLA, 2014; O'Hagan, 2013; Saner, 2013). There are many factors that can affect the processes of learning English and integration which are discussed in the following section.

The relationship between language proficiency and integration

Whilst English language is often cited as a crucial factor in integration, the relationship between language learning and integration is in fact underexplored in the research. However, evidence points to a 'linguistic penalty' experienced by people with lower levels of English in terms of access to employment (Roberts, 2010). They are more likely to be unemployed or in lower skilled jobs (Office for National Statistics, 2014) and earn less (Dustmann & Fabbri, 2003). However, statistical findings on employment rates or earnings do not reveal the complexities of the relationship between work and progress in language learning; for example, finding and progressing in work, and being socially mobile can facilitate the acquisition of English language skills as it can provide financial independence, improved self esteem and opportunities to socialise (Charsley et al, 2016; Ros i Sole, 2014).

Learning English is by no means the only factor in integration (Giddley & Jayaweera, 2010). Other barriers migrants and refugees may face include: public hostility and racism (Bryers et al, 2013; Gidley & Jayaweera, 2010); poor and insecure housing (Gidley & Jayaweera, 2010; Rutter 2013); higher levels of unemployment and lower pay (Bryers et al, 2013; Commission on Integration and Cohesion, 2007; Rutter et al, 2007; Vertovec, 2006); increased likelihood of exclusion from social interactions (Rutter, 2013); lack of practical information about life in the UK and knowledge of rights (Action Acton, 2014; Commission on Integration and Cohesion, 2007); and restrictions in their rights and entitlements (Giddley & Jayaweera, 2010, Rutter et al, 2007). Pre-migration experiences such as previous education, employment, and social class also have the potential to impact positively or negatively on

employment and integration experiences in the UK (Rutter, 2013). The literature outlined in this section so far details the factors which may affect integration for migrants and refugees, which include English language proficiency. However there is little exploration of how the acquisition of English skills is related to the processes of integration.

Although not explicitly addressing integration, second language learning research which explores how language acquisition is shaped by the wider social context and the power relations within it can help us to understand the experiences and social interactions of migrant and refugee language learners living in Britain. The disadvantages experienced by many migrants and refugees can lead to marginalisation which may be reinforced by negative positioning in political and media discourse (Cooke & Simpson, 2009). The context within which migrants and refugees learn English is characterised by the identity positions of the learners and those of their interlocutors, as well as by unequal power relations. Power can be understood as referencing:

the socially constructed relations among individuals, institutions and communities through which symbolic [e.g. language, education and friendship] and material [e.g. economic] resources in a society are produced, distributed and validated. (Norton, 2013, p. 47)

Power relations are enacted in everyday interactions involving language, and speech serves to establish the position of and between the interlocutors (Bourdieu, 1977). Many interactions involve an imbalance of power, and therefore, part of mastering a language means gaining the right to speech: 'the power to impose reception' and being considered as 'worthy to speak' by the listener (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 648). In second language contexts, a person's 'audibility' is the extent to which non-expert speakers are recognised as legitimate by expert speakers as users of the dominant discourse (Miller, 2004; Pavlenko & Blackledge, 2004). Negative subject positions, combined with insufficient expertise in English and lack of symbolic and material resources can make migrant learners' encounters with the locally born population 'unequal and asymmetrical in terms of power differentials' (Cooke & Simpson, 2009, p. 20). Within these encounters migrants' and refugees' level of language proficiency may be evaluated as inadequate, preventing them from being accepted as legitimate speakers who are considered worthy to speak (Roberts & Cooke, 2009), thus affecting their power to impose reception and potentially rendering them 'inaudible' (Cooke & Simpson, 2009). Hence, unequal power relations, as well as how migrants and refugees are positioned, can impact on

both the opportunities for, and the quality of, interaction in English, and therefore, potentially inhibit language learning (Block, 2007; Bremer, Roberts, Vasseur, Siminot & Broder, 1996; Norton, 2013). Additionally, social isolation and disadvantage can mean that for many migrant and refugee language learners, their interactions in the target language are limited in quantity and variety (Cooke, 2006), often predominantly consisting of 'gate keeping' (bureaucratic and service) encounters (Bremer et al, 1996) where imbalances of power may be particularly salient.

Cummins, Early and Stille, (2011) use Manyak's (2004) concept of 'identities of competence' to describe how minority students in literacy classrooms can be empowered by classroom work which harnesses and values their own particular cultural and linguistic knowledge and competences. Conversely, when students' cultural and linguistic knowledge and competences are not valued and they are positioned as low achievers, this can be internalised and the students may disengage from school work that reinforces an 'identity of incompetence' (Cummins et al, 2011, p. 32). I apply these concepts to the classroom and wider social experiences of adult migrant and refugee language learners, regarding their interactive and reflexive positioning in interactions. How individuals are positioned, or position themselves, in terms of capable or deficit (or legitimate or illegitimate) speakers of English can shape identities of competence or incompetence. Concerns about being assigned a negative identity position (including an identity of incompetence) may lead migrant and refugee language learners to attempt to avoid situations which require them to speak English (Block, 2007; Norton, 2013).

The previous sections outlined how migrant and refugee language learners may be under pain and pressure as they strive to learn English and build lives for themselves in England. The literature on the social context of second language learning elucidates how migrants' and refugees' opportunities for social interaction and English speaking practice are shaped by identity positions, power relations and experiences of marginalisation within the social context in which they live. However, this literature does not explicitly address how these factors may affect the processes of integration. I have also discussed research which outlines the barriers and facilitators to integration for migrants and refugees, but the relationship between learning English and integration for these groups is underexplored in this literature. Thus, there appears to be a lack of research exploring refugees' and migrants' experiences of language learning and its relationship to integration in the English context. Furthermore, language barriers can mean that the views of migrants and refugees are often excluded from

research (Lee, Sulaiman-Hill & Thompson, 2014). Bryers et al (2013) addressed this in their study which explored in depth the views of their ESOL learner participants on integration; however, their study did not examine in detail the interrelationship between English language learning and integration. Therefore, my study aims to explore these issues with a class of ESOL learners in order to illuminate ways in which language learning and integration are related for migrant and refugee language learners in England, as well as capture the ways that participants might define successful integration for themselves.

The following research questions emerged from these aims:

1. *According to ESOL learners' accounts, what are their perceptions of what it means to be integrated?*
2. *What do ESOL learners' accounts of their experiences reveal about the relationship between learning English and integration?*

Research design

Research context and participants

The study was situated in a large, diverse English city and took place in an adult education college where I had been an ESOL teacher for 13 years. The participants were an Entry Level 3 ESOL class (approximately intermediate level) which consisted of 14 learners: two men and twelve women. The group represented diverse nationalities, languages, immigration statuses, and length of time in the country (see Appendix 1). I had already been teaching the class for 7 months prior to the study, so we already knew each other fairly well in our roles as teacher and learners. The qualitative study took place over four weeks in 2015 and comprised a total of two participatory discussion sessions of approximately two hours each with the whole class, followed by individual interviews with three learners.

The ESOL class was not a 'purposive' sample, where individual participants are selected according to specific characteristics intended to illuminate the theme being studied (Ritchie, Lewis, Elam, Tennant & Rahim, 2014). However, the sample can be said to possess 'symbolic representation' as it both 'represents' and 'symbolises' features of relevance to the investigation (Ritchie et al, 2014, p. 116) because its diverse composition is a common feature of ESOL classes (Cooke & Simpson, 2008). After carrying out the group sessions, I identified a

volunteer sample (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011) of three students who were available and willing to be interviewed. A brief introduction to the three interviewees follows.

Hani is a Somali woman who came to the UK in 2010, whose three children are still with her mother in Africa. She had worked in a shop and in various part-time cleaning jobs since coming to the UK, and is divorced. At the time of the study she was 28, had been attending ESOL classes for approximately 4 years, and was studying for the Life in the UK citizenship test.

Mira is from Bangladesh and came to the UK in 2005, after living in Germany for 13 years. She started ESOL classes on arrival but stopped in 2007 to look after her 3 children, starting again 8 months before the study took place. She was 44 at the time of the study and not working. She has a British passport and her husband is Bangladeshi.

Isabela is a European Union citizen from Portugal who came to the UK in 2013. She started ESOL classes 18 months before the study. She was 33, not working, caring for her baby daughter and living with her Portuguese partner.

Methodology

As my intention was to explore the meanings the participants gave to their language learning and integration experiences, I drew on a social constructionist approach to inquiry. This approach construes meaning and reality as being ‘constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their world’ (Crotty, 1998, p. 42) and these meanings and interactions are shaped by society and culture (Crotty, 1998). The research employed semi-structured interviews as well as participatory group discussion sessions, the combination of which aimed to allow participants to co-construct meaning through interaction with one another and with me.

The methods used in the two participatory sessions were inspired by those used in participatory education and development projects such as Action Aid’s Reflect (Archer and Newman, 2003) and UNICEF Bangladesh (1993) and by participatory ESOL practitioners (e.g. Auerbach, 1992; Bryers et al, 2013; English for Action London, n.d.; Cardiff, Newman & Pearce, 2007). These draw on the philosophies of Brazilian literacy educator Freire (1972) who advocated that teachers and students learn together using dialogical methods through which they critically reflect on learners’ lives to initiate change (Bryers et al, 2013). Participatory education challenges traditional learner and teacher roles in the classroom, creating a democratic communicative space. The teacher acts as a facilitator and catalyst for activities

and discussion, learning and reflecting together with the participants. Activities involve participants working together and often include constructing and discussing visual tools such as maps, diagrams, photographs and video (Cardiff, Newman & Pearce, 2007).

The visual and physical nature of participatory techniques are potentially more accessible to language learners and to those with low literacy skills and can help overcome literacy and language barriers to communication by supporting and scaffolding communication in English (Bryers et al 2013; Cardiff, Newman, & Pearce, 2007; Moon & Sunderland, 2008; Winstanley & Cooke, 2016). Therefore, the study drew on these techniques in order to stimulate discussion and reflection in the participatory sessions and to support the participants with their communication in English. Unequal power relations that migrants and refugees experience in society can be replicated in the ESOL classroom (Auerbach, 1993; Williamson, 2011). An additional aim of these techniques was to reduce the power relations between researcher / participant and teacher/ student and thus facilitate the learners to take control of the communicative space and reduce my influence in their interactions. In this way the participatory methods were designed to facilitate the participants to engage in extended talk and reflection around the topics of learning English and integration. I was then able to address my research questions through analysis of the activities and interaction during these sessions, as described below.

Data collection methods

I commenced the group sessions by facilitating discussion of the meanings and concepts of the word 'integration', enabling the participants to construct shared understandings of the term. After this the participants examined photographs, which I had selected to depict various aspects of daily life¹. These pictures were used to generate discussion (Bryers et al, 2013; Moon & Sunderland, 2008; Reflect, 2003; UNICEF Bangladesh, 1993). I also set up a 'card sort' (Chambers, 2002; UNICEF Bangladesh, 1993), or 'card cluster' activity (Bryers et al, 2013) which involved participants writing opinions or experiences concerning living in the UK on separate pieces of card and then sorting them into themes collectively – an activity which involved much debate, and sharing anecdotes and experiences (figure 1). The participants also worked in groups to discuss questions which were displayed on the board (see Appendix 2), and then they attached responses on the wall for others to read and discuss (Figure 2). As the table in Appendix 1 shows, the participants spoke a variety of

languages. In our normal class sessions, students used their other languages at times, especially those languages shared by two or more students, although English was spoken most of the time. During the two participatory sessions in the study, the discussion was almost all in English, perhaps due to how the participants had grouped themselves.

My role in these sessions was to set up and facilitate the activities and then take a back seat in the discussions in order to encourage discussion and reflection between participants. In each session, I used three audio recorders placed around the room to capture everyone's contributions to the discussion, and the interaction was transcribed after the sessions. The visual data, which consisted of the work produced by the participants and digital photos of these, were saved for analysis (examples of these are shown in figures 1 and 2 below).

Figure 1: Card sort activity

Figure 2: Responses to discussion questions

Following these two sessions I conducted the three individual interviews, which lasted approximately an hour and a half each, in a private classroom at the college. They were semi-structured, using an interview guide (Cohen et al, 2011; Johnson & Christensen, 2012) which I drew from the themes and issues which emerged from the participatory sessions, in order to further explore these in relation to the research questions (see Appendix 3). These interviews were audio recorded and later transcribed.

Power relations and other ethical issues

Ethical issues in classroom research include consideration of the teacher-student power relationships (Burns, 2010; Bryers et al, 2013). As they were already my students prior to the study, the participants may have felt obliged to participate in the project; therefore, before I sought their consent I endeavoured to ensure that they understood the purpose and procedure of the research and that they were free to opt out by attending another class during the sessions in which I collected the data. The participants were assured of anonymity and gave permission to be quoted in the study, on the understanding that pseudonyms would be

used. I followed the official ethics procedure of my university institution and gained approval from their ethics committee before I commenced the data collection.

It is necessary to consider how our respective subject positions of researcher / teacher and participant / student may have influenced the research process and product (Henry, 2003; Giampapa, 2011), including how I may have been positioned by the participants (Giampapa & Lamoureux, 2011). For example, my identity position as a white British person may have caused the participants to suppress some of their negative opinions of British people, or British society. In addition, our teacher-student relationship may have influenced how the participants chose to represent themselves to me. The participatory methods aimed to diminish the influences of these factors on the interactions and on the research. Furthermore, the variety of activities – which included small group discussions where the participants were talking ‘amongst themselves’, whole class discussion, anonymous written responses, and one-to-one interviews – enabled the participants to express themselves in different communication contexts.

However, the short time frame and limited number of participatory sessions precluded the development of a fully participatory ethos where expectations of roles and power relations could be properly challenged, and control over the sessions truly shared (for an illustration of a fully participatory project conducted with ESOL learners see Bryers et al, 2013). These limitations notwithstanding, it was evident that the participants developed their ideas and engaged increasingly deeply with the topics during the participatory sessions. These sessions also facilitated the interviews as they allowed the interviewees to engage with the issues and activate language before being interviewed.

Data Analysis

I used a thematic approach to data analysis, adapted from Braun and Clarke (2006) and Spencer, Ritchie, Ormston, O’Conner and Barnard (2014). This involved repeated reading and revisiting the transcripts and visual data, and using “mind maps” in order to identify, interpret, review and re-interpret themes, patterns and groups of meanings within the data. My interpretation was then drawn from these processes in relation to the research questions. Using a thematic approach as a basis for my interpretations enabled me to conduct my analysis across the different modalities of the data.

Research Findings

The participants addressed the topics thoughtfully and expressed many insightful ideas; grammatical errors did not detract from their articulateness. To reflect this in my findings I have used the participants' words as much as possible, amending grammar only when meaning may have been impeded (Corden & Sainsbury, 2006). Key issues which emerged regarding pain and pressure in language learning and integration included barriers and limitations for social interaction in English, and how these impediments could be resisted or overcome.

Pain and pressure in language learning and integration

In their accounts the participants' described some of the challenges they faced in trying to carve out a life for themselves in England. Key issues were feelings of isolation, attitudes of some British people and concerns about inadequate English language skills.

Social Isolation: 'Here, even the neighbours they don't say hi together'

Many participants described how they wanted more social interaction with English speakers; getting to know and making friends with neighbours is a potentially important source of interaction with members of the settled community. However, this was described as difficult due to the relatively insular and private lifestyle that participants characterised as the norm in the UK, which meant they felt isolated and without support from neighbours or family.

For me the problem here is lonely, feeling lonely...Like in Africa you are always with family. Here always at home alone with the children. Here it's hard work (Mariama).

In Somalia they are more communicating, with neighbours, everything, you know...Here even the neighbours they don't say hi together...The mother has to do everything...the father he go to work and he come back and he's tired and he can't do at home anything... Here the children are always in the home. In Somalia children play outside, relatives and neighbours look after the children (Sahra).

These accounts highlight how traditional gender roles concerning childcare can become particularly salient when transposed onto English life and may limit opportunities for social interaction. Mira and Isabela described how their roles as the primary carers of their children

prevented them from employment, which they portrayed as a potential opportunity for more social interaction in English:

[M]aybe I can start a small job for me. It's good to practise my English... when I start work maybe I can action with the people (Mira).

Access to social interaction in English is an important factor in a person's ability to improve their language skills. However, these accounts highlight how female migrants and refugees with family commitments are often more likely to be socially isolated (Rutter, 2013). When opportunities *do* exist for interaction with English speakers, wider societal power relations can hinder ESOL learners' ability to communicate successfully, or lead them to avoid certain situations altogether.

Inaudibility: 'Sometimes some English people don't listen you'

In addition to a lack of access to social interactions, for Isabela, the negative attitudes of some British people towards her as a non-proficient speaker affected her opportunities to speak English. She suggested that this was an area where difference was not respected:

I think some English people don't care understand you... I think the people think if you stay here in this country you must speak English, and sometimes [they] don't listen you or ignore you. [They should] speak with you and try to understand you.

Isabela is expected to speak English but at the same time she feels that her lack of proficiency means that she is positioned negatively by some she interacts with. She is apparently being judged as a deficit speaker of English and not accepted as a legitimate speaker (Roberts and Cooke, 2009). In these encounters, the "native speakers" do not make the effort to 'achieve understanding' (Bremer et al, 1996) by contributing to the negotiation of meaning in the interaction and the responsibility to communicate thus falls on Isabela (Block, 2007). This pressure further impedes her abilities and hinders her 'power to impose reception' (Bourdieu 1977) and her 'audibility' (Miller 2004):

Your mind is blank, because you nervous, you try to speak and listen and understand everything and sometimes it doesn't work (Isabela).

Avoiding interactions: 'I got a leaflet but I never joined'

Mira reported that she did not have much contact with English speaking people outside of the ESOL class, and when she did, she felt that her language skills marked her out as an outsider:

Sometimes when I listen to people speak very good English, and I can't not too good, then I feel not integrated.

She expressed the desire for more contact with Anglophones, and aside from finding work, she also viewed taking part in parent's activities at her son's primary school as a good opportunity to practise her English and feel more integrated. However, she was reluctant to do so as she felt that her language was a barrier to this:

All the parents they are coming in the school in the evening time. I got a leaflet but I never joined because the one problem is my English. My English is not too good.

She maintained that it is just her language that is stopping her as she is normally a sociable person:

I want to talk but the main problem is, barrier is, my language... that's why I cannot integrate with people.

Although Mira described her English skills as poor, she was actually a fluent and confident speaker in the ESOL class and in the interview. How she sees herself - her reflexive positioning (Davies & Harré, 1990) – appears to affect her willingness to join new social groups. In the ESOL class she has an identity of competence (Cummins et al, 2011, Manyak, 2004) as one of the stronger students, but outside of class, it seems that she wishes to avoid a negative identity position as someone whose English is 'not too good' and who is 'not integrated', i.e. an identity of incompetence (Cummins et al, 2011). It could be that she attempts to maintain a positive identity for herself by avoiding situations which might threaten this (Norton, 2013); and this may be preventing her from seeking the social contact she feels she needs to improve her English and feel more integrated.

These accounts suggest that for some participants, access to interactions with English speakers were limited at times. They also highlight how, when participants had opportunities for mixing with English speakers, concerns about being positioned negatively by others could

hinder their ability to communicate in English, or lead to avoidance of situations in which deficit identity positions might be reinforced.

Overcoming pain and pressure in language learning and integration

Participants also articulated ways in which the pain and pressures in language learning and integration could be resisted or surmounted. Key themes concerned the conditions which enabled participants to feel confident to speak, and the factors which promoted feelings of being integrated.

Context and self-confidence: 'it's not my problem; I'm a client'

For Isabela and Mira, their levels of confidence seemingly affected how they felt about interacting in English, and feelings of anxiety were barriers to interaction. Norton (2013) highlights how self-confidence and anxiety to speak are not innate in language learners, but can be constructed in social interaction and are associated with the context of that interaction; therefore positive contexts can reduce anxiety and make language learners confident to speak. For example Hani recounted a positive experience of social interaction at a time when she had little spoken English; new to Britain she struck up a friendship with a British neighbour:

...but I couldn't understand what she said. She tried to explain everything, she liked me. I liked her, but when she say 5 words I will get 2 - another three I wasn't understand. But she was kind, good, she tell me every time story, long story, she was very kind.

Far from avoiding this contact, she appreciated it and was keen to continue it. The neighbour apparently treated Hani in such a way that she felt confident to interact with her, despite not always achieving understanding.

How a person positions *themselves* in an interaction can also impact on its success. For example Isabela described being able to communicate successfully in the supermarket where she was not worried about her interlocutor's attitude:

I speak [and] if that person don't understand I try speak again or use another word to explain and if they don't care it's not my problem; I'm a client.

It seems that in this interaction, Isabela could claim a stronger identity position, as a client, and thus perceived herself as 'worthy to speak' (Bourdieu, 1977). She therefore felt confident and not anxious – and thus she could be audible. The contextual nature of self-confidence and anxiety is also evident when we compare Mira's self confidence in class, where she had a strong identity position, with her anxiety about joining a new group where this would be put at risk.

Forging an identity of competence: 'I can help them what they need – I understand'

In addition to being dependent on context, anxiety to speak is constructed by lived experiences (Norton, 2013). For migrant and refugee second language learners these can be influenced by unequal power relations in interactions. Isabela directly related her difficulties to the attitudes that some native speakers hold about learners of English, and I have proposed that Mira's reluctance to join new social networks was due to her wish to avoid being positioned as a deficit English speaker who is 'not integrated'. On the other hand Hani reported generally feeling confident when speaking; and did not seem to let feelings of inadequate language skills inhibit her interactions (like Isabela) or prevent her from forging new social networks (like Mira). Yet Hani's speaking and listening skills were no more proficient than the other two; in fact, when she spoke English her "accent" was the strongest – sometimes impeding clarity. In addition, as a black Somali woman wearing a hijab in England it would be hard to conclude that she is the subject of less negative positioning than Isabela and Mira. It may be that in the interviews our respective teacher and student identities caused her to be cautious about expressing anxieties about speaking English. However, Hani's accounts suggest that her particular situation may have helped develop this confidence in speaking English. Unlike Mira and Isabela, she had no partner or family locally to help her so she had to tackle difficult situations in English by herself. Also, Hani was the only one of the three to be employed. She asserted that her job helped her to feel integrated as it gave her opportunities for many types of interaction in English:

If you are working you have a lot of situations, and if you don't know how to deal [with them]... you have to learn how to deal.

Having to handle and overcome problems in various situations appears to have increased her confidence to speak. She took pride in the fact that she managed by herself and related this to her progress in English:

I speak English a lot of places... My job there is a lot friends; manager, supervisor ... I'm talking, maybe half day I speak English. Or in the city centre, when I shopping, I'm speaking all myself I don't have another person help with language. On the bus, I talk English, even some person ask me a question I can answer quick; I can help them what they need – I understand...Year after year I improve .

She described feeling positive about her English skills, and it appears that her belief in her ability to converse in many situations, and even help other people, has helped her to develop an identity of competence (Cummins et al, 2011).

Confidence and independence: 'Now I can do everything for myself'

The participants' accounts indicate that a crucial facilitator of confidence in English skills was attending ESOL classes, for example:

I came to the UK I can speak [English] but I was very shy and thought I would talk wrong and the people would be shocked. I was silent, even if I know I can't answer ... after I start ESOL class my teacher say 'if you shy you never learn', and I remember that. I try to speak I try to answer questions ... after that I feel better for my English, I go to GP and I speak. I get self confidence ... and I can talk and I feel better and I forget to [be] shy. If you shy you can't learn, if you want to learn don't [be] shy (Sahra).

This echoes Asadulla's (2014) findings that attending ESOL classes can reduce anxiety about speaking English, and increases learners' confidence in tackling a wider variety of situations where English is required, without the help of interpreters or family members. This self-reliance could increase feelings of integration:

I feel integrated when I help myself. I don't want to be support by anybody; to phone, for example, council problem, or something problem, I phone myself... I have big self-confidence to speak on the phone (Zenja).

Independence not only provides further opportunities to practise English skills, but also seems to help people feel more integrated as they can operate more successfully in an increased variety of settings. As Isabela said, if you feel integrated

[y]ou feel more confident to speak and you know other person understands you, you have communication.

Feelings of integration and confidence to converse with English speakers appear to be mutually reinforcing; interaction with British people and Anglophones was described as contributing to feelings of integration as the following quotations demonstrate:

Integration is to do something with people from this country (Ginaway).

I feel integrated when I can understand English well (written response).

Respect and acceptance: 'it's good that we are allowed to do our customs'

The participants' accounts suggest that feeling integrated can facilitate confidence in speaking English. The ESOL classroom was described as a place that fostered feelings of belonging, acceptance, and being integrated:

In ESOL class I feel integrated (written response).

[We] come from difficult countries...different cultures... but when you in UK altogether, friendly, you don't mind about different culture, you make the same group (Ginaway).

They emphasised the importance of living in a multicultural society, where their religious and cultural identities and practices were accepted and respected, and cited anti-discrimination laws as fostering an accepting attitude.

It's very nice to see mix culture here...here we can do everything we want to...It's a very good thing that we are allowed to do our customs (Mandip).

In the UK is freedom religion, and respect each other... you have to respect your neighbour, what they are, and they respect you. What kind of religion, what kind of, they don't care... A lot of people they all respect. Because the rule in this country that says that one (Hani).

People ...has grown up with this [law] and they accept...it's very different in my country (Isabela).

In addition, a sense of security and personal freedom appears to foster feelings of belonging:

I feel inside society because still I didn't had a problem. Some person when they talk to me, they feel outside in the UK, because they had a lot problems ... but I haven't had any problem...It's safe, it's freedom. I feel settled in the UK (Hani).

An important aspect of this multicultural ethos was feeling able to speak and maintain their "first" languages. It was not portrayed as an impediment to integration; rather, a person can choose whatever language befits the situation. They characterised being multilingual as an important skill both for them and their children, with both English and their expert languages described as valuable skills in a language toolkit.

It's good for a person to speak many languages (Isabela).

[My children] learn English and they know Bangla very good. I think it's a good quality to know more languages. In school they learn also French and German (Mira).

The participants voiced a need for a mutual acceptance and adjustment to one another's identity and values:

[It is] more easy for us ...if we understand British culture, and think 'we are here and we need to talk British, we need to do some things in British'. [But] British people [should] try to understand more, open more mind and try to really understand it is difficult for us... [to]stay in another country (Isabela).

For Isabela this open mindedness applied particularly to the attitudes of "native speakers" towards those trying to learn English. She asserted that if British people were more sympathetic towards her situation as a learner of English and made more effort to listen to her, this would help her communicate. Her account indicates an additional way to help migrant and refugee language learners feel accepted and thus overcome the pain and pressure in learning English and integration.

These findings show that in contexts where participants held a strong subject position they felt confident to speak and able to operate independently in their daily lives. Additionally, the

multicultural nature of British society was felt to facilitate feeling accepted and integrated. Attending ESOL classes contributed both to confidence in English and to feelings of integration.

Conclusions

The purpose of the study was to seek the views of adult ESOL learners on what constitutes successful integration and how learning English relates to their integration experiences. The first research question sought to explore ESOL learner's perceptions of what it means to be integrated. The participants constructed shared meanings of the term "integration" together as a group. They used the terms "integration" or "integrated" frequently as they discussed their views and experiences. In their accounts they constructed integration as a two-way process in which a multicultural ethos was a central constituent. Integral to this was respect and protection for their cultural practices and rights, but they also voiced the need for adjustment and tolerance on their part. The findings also show how the participants characterised integration as involving participation and social interaction in a variety of contexts and situations, including interactions with neighbours, at their child's school, through employment, in ESOL classes, and dealing with organisations such as the local council. The participants reported feeling integrated in certain situations and not in others, for example, depending on whether they are able to communicate in a particular context, thus reflecting the concept of integration as a dynamic and multidimensional process (Bryers et al, 2013; Gidley & Jayaweera, 2010; Spencer & Charlseay, 2016).

The second research question considered what the ESOL learners' accounts of their experiences reveal about the relationship between learning English and integration. English proficiency was perceived as fundamental for feelings of integration for its practical role in enabling interaction with British people, accessing goods and services, and achieving personal goals and aspirations. However, speaking English was not associated with a sense of taking on a British identity; rather, English was described as a skill which constituted part of their multilingual repertoires (Simpson, 2012). The study also elucidated some of the areas of pain and pressure that the participants faced as they negotiated the processes of language learning and integration. Concerns about being positioned negatively and as "not integrated" could create anxiety and affect their social interactions, potentially rendering them inaudible (Cooke & Simpson, 2009) in some encounters, or lead them to avoid particular situations which might highlight this negative identity position (Block, 2007; Norton, 2013). However, these subject positions are dependent on context. If participants perceived themselves to have a strong

identity position in certain contexts, they felt confident and unafraid of making mistakes, and in this way it was possible to overcome these particular impediments to language learning and integration.

The participants' accounts of their experiences show how confidence or anxiety when speaking English can facilitate or impede integration. Opportunities for practising language in ESOL classes and in everyday social interactions, together with an individuals' ability to adopt a strong identity position within a specific context, can increase confidence to speak (Norton, 2013). Confidence to communicate in a wider range of situations without worrying about making mistakes means less reliance on help from interpreters, family or friends (Asadulla, 2014), resulting in increased independence and feelings of integration which further increase an individual's confidence. In this way individuals can forge an identity of competence (Cummins et al, 2011; Manyak, 2004), thus gaining a more positive subject position from which to speak (Norton, 2013). Another element in facilitating this strong subject position and self-confidence is a sense of belonging, and feeling accepted and respected. This particularly applied to acceptance of their cultural practices, religious beliefs and positions as 'non-expert' speakers of English. Thus the participants' accounts of their experiences indicate that the processes of learning English and integration can be mutually reinforcing.

The social constructionist approach in the research project enabled me to foreground the voices and accounts of the ESOL learner participants and explore how they constructed meanings and interpreted their experiences in their interactions with one another and with me. Several theoretical implications emerged from the findings which build on previous research in the fields of second language learning and migrant and refugee integration. Firstly, the study drew on research which elucidates how the second language learning experiences of migrants are shaped by power relations and identity positions within the wider social context (e.g. Block, 2007; Norton, 2013). By applying these concepts to consider the integration experiences of the ESOL learner participants, I have highlighted ways that power relations and subject positioning in the social context within which they live act to facilitate or impede learning English and feeling integrated. Secondly, the findings build on the large body of literature that examines the barriers and facilitators to integration for migrants and refugees (e.g. Giddley & Jayaweera, 2010; Bryers et al, 2013; Rutter 2013). Whilst the literature on integration often emphasises the importance of learning English for integration and participation in British society, there is little consideration of *how* English acquisition is related to integration. This study has gone some way to addressing this by elucidating that, for the

experiences of the ESOL learner participants, learning English and integration are inter-related processes, where feeling integrated can enhance opportunities for learning English. The study also expanded the concepts of identities of competence (Cummins et al, 2011; Manyak, 2004) to apply them to the wider social experiences of ESOL learners to elucidate the role that self-confidence and feelings of being accepted play in the mutually reinforcing processes of language learning and integration.

Various implications emerge for ESOL pedagogy and policy. The findings highlight the importance of ESOL classes as a space for learners to build feelings of integration, self-confidence and to gain language skills. Therefore, government funding for ESOL classes should be increased, rather than decreased, to widen access and meet the needs of the range of language learners. The study also found that cultivating and reinforcing identities of competence both inside the ESOL classroom and in the wider social context is important for increasing confidence and proficiency in English. ESOL pedagogy can further promote identities of competence by harnessing learners' multilingual repertoires and drawing on learners' full linguistic and communicative competencies, including their expert languages, to support learning and promote positive identity positions (Auerbach, 1993; Cummins, 2009; Cummins et al, 2011; Simpson, 2012).

Another way in which ESOL teachers can promote confidence and positive identity positions is through drawing on participatory ESOL pedagogy (e.g. Moon and Sunderland, 2008; Bryers et al, 2013; English for Action London, n.d.; Winstanley and Cooke, 2016). Participatory ESOL challenges traditional classroom roles, and instead, the learners and teacher participate together in the co-construction of knowledge and skills. This approach rejects deficit models of learning, enabling the learners to have more powerful positions within the classroom, and therefore stronger identity positions. Participatory pedagogy also involves learners critically reflecting on important issues in their lives, and in this way, can provide a space where ESOL learners can examine and resist negative discourses. Wider application of participatory pedagogy techniques in ESOL teaching could increase opportunities for learners to claim more positive identity positions and boost self-confidence which, as the study found, can facilitate integration.

Policy implications emerge from the outcomes of this study. Policy makers and others concerned with integration should shift the focus away from language, culture and identity integration, and address the 'everyday concerns' of migrants and refugees (Rutter, 2013, p. 42). In this study, these included participants' feelings of isolation, the attitudes of English

speakers towards them and confidence to participate in English in a variety contexts, and how these issues impacted on feelings of integration. The findings highlight the importance of feeling accepted by British people and society, yet political and media discourse on immigration and integration reinforces deficit subject positions of migrants and refugees and negative public attitudes towards them. To support integration, measures should be taken to promote the representation of more positive identities of refugees and migrants, to recalibrate public attitudes towards them, an example being the '*I am an Immigrant*' campaign (IAAI n.d.) which used posters and the internet to portray positive images of migrants.

Lastly, the study raises implications for research methodology. The use of participatory tools as part of the research methodology in this study helped to facilitate the participants' interaction by scaffolding and supporting the participants' communication in English and facilitating meaningful spontaneous exchanges between participants which were independent of my interventions. This is a small exploratory study which used only a small number of participatory techniques with ESOL learners who had an intermediate level of English. Further research is needed which enables the viewpoints of people with lower levels of English to be accessed, for example, by using participatory methodologies which involve bilingual participants to act as interpreters, and by including multimodal methods.

In conclusion, the study has attempted to address the gaps in knowledge regarding the relationship between integration and language learning for migrants and refugees in England. However, its focus was on the experiences of the participants on a personal level, explored through using participatory methods in an ESOL classroom. The study did not aim to examine in broader terms how the participants' experiences of integration and language learning were affected by structural factors such as immigration status, socio-economic class, inequality or gender. Additional research addressing these issues more extensively is necessary in order to further examine the integration experiences of ESOL learners, and migrants and refugees in general, in order to improve policy and pedagogy.

Note

¹ Twenty nine photographs were provided and these included pictures of people in a variety of settings and from a variety of ethnic, cultural and religious backgrounds. Due to copyright restrictions, it is not possible to reproduce these photographs in this article.

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Appendix 1. Participant Information

Name	Age	Place of birth	'First' Languages <i>Other languages</i>	M/F	Length of time in UK (aprox)	History of formal English learning	Occupation
Ismail	24	Somali	Somali <i>Arabic</i>	M	7 years	ESOL 5 years	security guard
Mariama	25	Guinea	French, Fula, Susu	F	3 years	started ESOL 2 years ago	full time parent
Zenia	25	Ethiopia	Amharic <i>Arabic</i>	F	6 years	ESOL 5 years	cleaner
Hani	28	Somalia	Somali <i>Arabic</i>	F	5 years	4 years ESOL	Cleaner
Selvi	30	Turkey	Turkish	F	2 years	ESOL 1 ½ years	full time parent
Isabela	33	Portugal	Portuguese	F	2 years	learnt English in Portugal 1 ½ years ESOL	Full time parent
Ginawy	34	Sudan	Arabic	M	5 years	started ESOL classes 4 years ago	unemployed (qualified teacher in Sudan)
Mandip	38	India	Punjabi	F	7 years	started ESOL 1 year ago	full time parent
Emma	38	China	Chinese	F	4 years	ESOL 3 years ago	Chinese takeaway assistant
Donieta	39	Albania	Albania	F	5 years	none until 5 months ago	Full time parent (farmer in Albania)
Amelia	39	Portugal	Portuguese	F	2 years	learnt English in Portugal, started ESOL classes 8 months ago	full time parent
Sahra	40	Somalia	Somali, <i>Arabic</i>	F	7 years	started ESOL classes 6 years ago	Full time parent
Mira	44	Bangladesh	Bengali <i>Hindi, Urdu German</i>	F	10 years	2 years 2005-2007, then started 8 months ago	Full time parent
Joya	45	Bangladesh	Bengali	F	over 20	started ESOL	full time

					years	6 years ago	parent
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Appendix 2. Questions for group discussion

- 1a. What things have helped you to progress in English? Think about now and the past.
- 1b. What things have made it difficult for you to progress in English? Think about now and the past.
- 2a. What things have helped you to feel integrated? Think about now and in the past.
- 2b. What things have stopped you feeling integrated? Think about now and in the past.

Appendix 3. Interview guide

1. Introduction

- Review participant information and consent form
- explain procedure – audio recorded, timing
- do not have to answer questions if don't want to
- check if they have any questions
- verbally confirm consent to continue

2. Background

- Age
- Where from and length of time in UK.
- Family / children / who live with
- Did you go to school/ college /university? How old when finished school?
- Employment, current and past
- Future plans: learning English, education, work etc

3. Learning English

- Length of time, where, when
- Did you start when you first came to the UK? Why / not?
- Tell me about your progress in learning English. Are you progressing? What is easy? What is difficult?
- How easy / difficult has it been to learn English?
- What has made it difficult?
- What has helped?
- What other things would help you to improve your English?

4. Speaking English

- Opportunities to speak English: where, when, who with?
- How do you feel when you are speaking English?
- How confident do you feel speaking English? People, situations.
- When don't you feel confident? (Shy)
- What would help you to feel more confident speaking English?

- What would give you more opportunities to speak English?
- What could Britain / British people do to help people learn and speak English?

5. Integration

- How integrated do you feel? Please explain.
- What things make you feel integrated? When do you feel integrated?
- What things stop you from feeling integrated? When don't you feel integrated?
- What would make you feel more integrated?
- How does learning English help you to feel more integrated?
- How much time do you spend with people of the same nationality? Tell me about it.
- How much time do you spend with people of different nationalities? Tell me about it.
- How much time do you spend with British people? Tell me about it.
- What could Britain do to help people integrate?
- How would being more integrated help you to improve your English?

6. Belonging / Identity

- How much do you feel part of British society / Britain? Why / why not?
- How much do you feel part of your local community? Why / why not?
- What is British identity? What does it mean to be British? In your opinion, what are British people like? Describe British people.
- In your opinion, do you / do people need to become more British / more like British people to integrate?
- Are you becoming more British / like British people?
- In your opinion can people keep their own culture and integrate?
- Can people speak their own language and be integrated? Think about when you speak your first language.
- Does speaking English make you feel more British?

7. Anything else you want to say?

8. Closing

- Reiterate confidentiality
- Any questions?
- Can contact me if have any questions in future.

Thank participant.
